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UNCLAS ROME 000465

SIPDIS

STATE FOR IO DAS MILLER, IO/EDA - BEHREND, KOTOK,
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USDA FOR FAS/ICD - WBRANT, LREICH, RHUGHES

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: UN REFORM: INDEPENDENT EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF
FAO SLATED TO BEGIN MARCH 13

REF: (A) 05 ROME 2082, (B) 05 ROME 2083,
(C) 05 ROME 3385, (D) 05 ROME 4027

1. (U) Summary: A Committee of the FAO Council charged with oversight of the comprehensive Independent External Evaluation (IEE) of FAO has just approved the selection of a high-caliber core team of evaluators and decided that the IEE would formally begin on March 13, subject to firm assurance that \$2.1 million in funding would be available for CY 2006. Thus far 16 developed and developing countries have made voluntary contributions to the IEE process, with \$1.8 million currently available or reasonably assured, out of a total requirement of \$4.3 million. The IEE of FAO, the largest such undertaking in the UN system, was spearheaded by the U.S. and could serve as a model for reform of the UN technical agencies. A significant USG contribution to the IEE (in addition to \$250,000 already given) would spur other donors to step forward and help assure the success of this important effort toward UN reform. End summary.

2. (U) After a year of preparatory work during which a broad consensus emerged among FAO members, the FAO Conference in November 2005 endorsed draft terms of reference (TOR) and oversight arrangements for the IEE (see ref D and previous). According to the TOR, the evaluation "...is to be comprehensive, external, professional, and fully independent from the Secretariat and member governments. The focus will be on relevance, efficiency and intended and unintended results, including outcomes and impacts and their effectiveness and sustainability." The IEE will encompass (1) FAO's technical work (operational as well as normative), (2) management and organization, (3) governance, and (4) FAO's role in the multilateral system. A Committee of the Council for the IEE (CC-IEE) was created to oversee the evaluation. The Committee is chaired by Brazilian Permanent Representative Perri; U.S. Alternate Permanent Representative Brakel is co-chair.

3. (U) At its meeting of February 14, the CC-IEE decided that evaluation work should be initiated on March 13, subject to the firm assurance by that date that \$2.1 million will be available for CY 2006. The first task of the evaluation core team will be to draw up an Inception Report in accordance with the TOR that would provide a proposed road map for the evaluation, including budgetary requirements, key deliverables and timing. The Inception Report would preferably be finalized and presented for consideration by the CC-IEE before the end of April 2006. As foreseen in the TOR, the findings of the IEE would be expected to be available in time for the FAO Conference in November-December 2007.

4. (U) In addition, the Committee decided to invite the following individuals to make up the evaluation core team (they had previously been interviewed in person by the CC Bureau and a working group for candidate selection):

-- Keith Bezanson (Canada) - team leader;

-- Uma Lele (India/USA) - core team member for technical work of FAO;

-- Michael Davies (UK) - core team member for management, organization and administration;

-- Carlos Perez del Castillo (Uruguay) - core team member for governance; and

-- Thelma Awori (Uganda) - core team member for FAO's role in the multilateral system.

5. (U) The Committee recognized that the core team would be supplemented as needed by specialist consultants who would complement the background and experience of core team members. Two independent Quality Assurance Advisers will be selected to assist the CC-IEE in its consideration of the Inception Report and its oversight of the evaluation.

¶6. (U) U.S. Deputy Permanent Representative Cleverley was asked to chair a working group of the CC-IEE to coordinate financing efforts for the voluntarily funded IEE. This group has developed a strategy to raise awareness and seek contributions from all FAO members, while recognizing that the industrialized and oil-exporting countries would contribute at a higher level than other members.

¶7. (U) The IEE will cost approximately \$4.3 million. As of February 14, a total of 14 developed countries (Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, UK, USA) and two developing countries (India, Saudi Arabia) had formally contributed or pledged funds to the IEE process. Thus far, \$1.8 million in contributions or pledges is reasonably assured for CY 2006. Another \$0.8 million in "indications of possible further contributions" has been received, leaving a shortfall of at least \$1.7 million. Sample contributions/pledges thus far: UK - \$523,000, Germany - \$477,000, Canada \$254,000, Switzerland - \$173,000, Finland - \$140,000.

¶8. (U) IEE Core Team Leader Bezanson -- competent, dynamic, and impressive -- participated in part of the CC-IEE meeting on February 14. He conceded that conducting the evaluation would be a challenging exercise, but expressed confidence in the core team. He pledged to conduct the IEE in a transparent manner, while assuring independence. He committed to provide the CC-IEE with regular feedback, and to avoid surprises. He expressed his determination that the IEE be forward-looking, presenting its recommendations in a manner that "opens up political space" for reform. He added that, if the evaluation results are not provocative, the team would have failed.

¶9. (U) According to Bezanson, the core team will begin its work by reading deeply into FAO and developing an inventory of key questions. The team will then assemble in Rome during the last week of March and the first week of April to begin extensive consultations with the widest possible range of stakeholders. Each team member will then submit a list of empirical questions to Bezanson, which he will craft into a first draft of the Inception Paper that will be posted on the evaluation website for member comments.

COMMENT

¶10. (U) More than a year of patient diplomacy and preparatory work has paid off well, as evidenced by this week's official green light for the IEE to begin in mid March. The TOR and the oversight mechanism adopted by the FAO Conference guarantee an evaluation that will be comprehensive, professional, and independent. The IEE continues to enjoy broad support and buy-in from a cross section of FAO members. The successful selection of a geographically diverse, gender-balanced core team of evaluators that includes highly respected experts of international stature provides additional reason to believe that the evaluation will be credible, and will lead to serious proposals to strengthen and reform FAO.

¶11. (U) In all likelihood, contributions and firm pledges anticipated within the next four weeks will bring the IEE Trust Fund up to the threshold of \$2.1 million that was established as a precondition for formal start-up of the evaluation. Nevertheless, there remains a significant funding gap. The USG, which was a leader in the development of the IEE concept now needs to assume a leadership role in its funding. We are working to expand the number of contributors, but given the size of other industrialized countries' contributions, the US does not appear at this point to be participating at an amount commensurate to its influence or interest in reform.

CLEVERLEY